CHAPTER 210

November 24, 2011

“You sure it’s a good idea to leave her alone?”

Justin and Kanji found themselves sitting on the hill overlooking town, Justin chewing away at the wooden tip of a toothpick all the while. Kanji seemed to want to talk, though about what Justin couldn’t say. All he knew was he wanted something, and Justin was really in no position to ignore him. Not because he felt any sort of obligation to Kanji or anything like that, though he supposed as Kanji’s friend he should be there when Kanji really needed him, which given the tone of his voice when he asked Justin if he was available was more than applicable to the current situation. No, more so he just felt the need to get out of that damn house. He wanted to make sure Maya was going to be perfectly okay alone in that house, but you know, there was only so much backtalk Justin could take before he lost his temper. Now that was especially dangerous coming from someone like Justin, but even more so than that, any time Maya and Justin had a fight, it tended to be of colossal proportions over shit that didn’t matter. And sure, they got over it eventually, but the days leading up to it… the silence killed him… Well… her anyway. They both gave the other the silent treatment when they were angry, usually the victim being the one torturing the other with the sounds of silence, but alas, Justin was kind of used to the silence now. Now instead of the silent treatment, it was more like the ‘cross arms and pout’ treatment, since that was the best she could do by this point. Beside the point; point being, Justin needed some air, to get away from Maya’s newfound attitude. He didn’t get it, he was helping her, taking care of her, and she kept getting angry at him everytime he expressed his concerns. It was disheartening to say the least.

“I’m more concerned about my silverware than I am her at this point.” Justin remarked sarcastically, scratching the tip of his nose as he rocked precariously back and forth on the park bench. That wasn’t true of course, he could give less of a crap about his dishes, especially in relation to Maya’s health and safety, but that didn’t mean her breaking all his dishes was suddenly okay by any stretch of the imagination. If there was one thing Justin wished more than anything else at this point, it was that Maya’s sudden renegade personality had subsided until she could actually get stuff out of the cabinets without breaking everything, from the bones in her body to the bowls stacked up in the kitchen. This whole self-reliant thing was going to get her seriously hurt, Justin feared, but god be damned if she’d stop anytime soon. “So what’s up?” Kanji stared blankly into the distance for a moment, not really sure how to ease into the topic. It was something he felt like he needed to get off his chest, but god be damned if he didn’t feel strange just bringing it up out of nowhere.

“…The other day… I went to visit Dad's grave. It's the first time I went on my own… Well, I had a lot to tell him.” Kanji mused out loud. A lot of things that had been happening in his life as of late had been giving him retrospective on the matter, and he felt like he just needed to put some old memories to rest. Of course, Kanji neglected to really catch on that Justin was the absolute worst person he could talk to about his deceased father. I mean, Justin was usually one to have an open ear about this kind of thing, but… Christ, talk about shitty timing. He sighed, leaning forward and running his fingers through his hair with annoyance and despair. He didn’t want to talk about Kanji’s dead father; it just reminded him of his own. And he didn’t want to think about him, not now, not ever. He was dead despite the bullshit Benedict tried to pump into his head. There was no conspiracy as Naoto kept trying to suggest. There was nothing. He was dead. Gone. He shouldn’t even be thinking about this; he should just leave the past be. So why did this plague his mind so?

“Oh… you want to talk about that.” Justin mutted, groaning ever so slightly as he realized the reason he was here. That was just fantastic, he managed to get away from Maya’s constant bitching, but in the process he had been entrapped in Kanji’s plan to discuss his dead father. Justin could only hope this was a starting point for the conversation and not the basis of it. And even then, now he had just managed to get his dead beat father on the mind; in that regard Justin supposed it didn’t really matter where the conversation went from this point on. The damage was already done. “How’d it go?”

“H-How was it…? Well… uhh…” Kanji mumbled and stammered. He wasn’t sure quite how to describe it. It was… relieving in a way, though he couldn’t quite put his finger on way. Perhaps it was just the chance to be able to tell his father in death what he never could in life. Maybe it was just the chance to talk to him. Kanji never did take much intiative to visit his father’s grave; it frightened him too much in truth. It was funny; both Kanji and Maya lost their father’s under similar conditions, yet they both seemed to develop fears on the exact opposite end of the spectrum. Maya could not step foot into a hospital without having a panic attack of immeasurable proportions, though Kanji could with just the slightest sensation of uneasiness deep in his bowels. On the other end of the spectrum, Kanji out right refused to go to the graveyard to visit his father’s coffin. He wasn’t necessarily afraid, but… he just couldn’t bring himself to do it. Maya could, however, and in fact did visit the cemetery on a regular basis to see her father… or at least the stone that marked where his corpse was currently decaying in the maggot infested grounds. She only stopped visiting once she had to run from San Diego, which in it’s own right was a sad if not necessary change. It was clear she missed her dad, and in that regard it felt wrong that she had to be stripped of her visitor’s pass, persay; but on the other hand… constantly living on grief, clinging to the past in vain hope that it’ll somehow change if you just keep wishing it would… that wasn’t any way to live. “I felt like I could finally face him… A little late, though.”

“Ah… lucky you.” Justin practically whispered. His voice came out softly, almost inaudibly at points, mostly because the topic at hand brought him a lot of pain. Of course, Kanji hadn’t really confronted his father about anything mind you, but what he had managed to do was still a hundred percent more than what Justin had ever accomplished. He never even saw a body… Bunch of legal bullshit I guess that let them hold onto the corpse or something since it was a homicide. Not that he planned to attend the funeral anyway; a bunch of people telling him they were sorry for his loss, people that probably were only there because they felt some kind of obligation, speaking horrendous lies to his face as they gripped his hand… He couldn’t deal with that. Besides, if they were sorry for his loss, it only meant that they never truly knew Justin’s father. And that meant they had no right to speak about a dead man, or what kind of person he was in life. He could only imagine the bullshit that was his father’s eulogy.

He showed up for the will of course, if only because… well… he was all alone now. His mother had died before his father had, succumbing to her illnesses a couple months prior. Justin’s father got especially vicious after that… perhaps that was the reason Justin just did not give the slightest fuck when they knocked at his door to say his father was dead. In truth, he was somewhat happy. That said however, with no parents left, he knew he was more or less on his own, and that meant he had to pray to god his father left him the house in his will; otherwise the bank would kick him out and take the property for themselves in no time. I don’t think I’m spoiling anything when I say Justin didn’t get to keep the house; hell, Justin had never met the guy who supposedly got possession of the house in all his life, which only went to infuriate him to no end. He got the house in Inaba though, which while he never knew it existed, he would by no means reject… There was of course a lot of paperwork involved though, not even just on Justin’s end but also the new owner of the house. And well… This WAS Justin’s home. He waited till the very last possible second to jump on that plane.

Perhaps that was a bit of a sidetrack, though I think it does factor into the simple question of what Justin would say to his father given the chance. Well first things first, he’d probably spit right into his father’s face for practically being the anti-christ incarnate. I mean, put aside the child abuse angle for a moment here; what kind of father knowing that when he died his child would be all alone WOULDN’T leave the house to him? I mean, sure, he certainly didn’t expect to die or anything like that, but the guy he left it to wasn’t even fucking family. That was just the biggest slap in the face to Justin, the last ‘fuck you’ from his father before spiraling down into the depths of hell. Served him right.

“Dad told me somethin' right before he died: ‘If you're a man, you have to become strong.’ I felt like he was telling me I wasn't a real man. Pissed me off. So, I changed my looks and pushed myself away from people…” Kanji continued, not so much as batting an eyelash at Justin’s off color remark about his father. I don’t know if he was doing it on purpose, or if it was just Kanji being as clueless as ever, but it

seemed like he was driving nails through every artery in Justin’s heart as he continue. He’d been there, done that. He got that feeling. It wasn’t a pretty one. In fact, it was outright painful: which is why he had no intention of reliving it, even for Kanji’s sake.

“Don’t take this the wrong way, but can we… please not talk about this.” Justin spoke up after a while, choking over a combination of fury and grief as Kanji went on. This was… too familiar for comfort. It was like déjà vu, and the worst kind at that. He couldn’t deal with this right now; he just… couldn’t deal with this. Kanji stared at him with a puzzled expression on his face for a moment, not really sure what he had managed to say to offend Justin. Or perhaps he was just upset that his alleged friend wouldn’t even hear him out in regards to a personal revelation he had. Most of the Investigation Team was left in the dark about Justin’s traumatic past, so it was understandable that Justin’s apparent reluctance to talk about this was a little less than understandable. It took a moment for Justin to realize he was getting funny looks, the dead silence slowly starting to weigh down upon him. “J-Just the father stuff... it’s just… ugh, nevermind.” Kanji sighed and rolled his eyes before turning over to the horizon. He supposed at the very least Justin wasn’t being rude about it, though he was curious now.

“Fighting gangs, thinking I was protecting Ma… Tryin' to catch this killer… I thought all that was how I was becoming strong. That I was really making up for all the trouble I caused… I was drunk off my "power"… But… That wasn't it. That ain't what …Dad meant…” Kanji paused, debating whether to bring his father up a second time. Truth be told, he couldn’t possibly have made it any worse than he already had. He had pretty much described Justin’s miserable childhood in a matter of two or three sentences, anything he said now was simply reiteration. Besides, it wasn’t just Kanji’s father that had ticked Justin off; hell it wasn’t his father at all: it was the relationship between the two that was killing Justin. It was shades of his own past, creeping up his leg and strangling his heart. “I still don't really get what bein' "strong" means, but I'm gonna start by not lying to myself. No more being scared of everyone, hiding my hobbies, staying away from people… Anytime, anyplace, I'm gonna bust right through as my own self! That's the way to deal with that "other me" in the TV world. As long as there's someone like that snot-nosed kid to accept me, I ain't afraid of nothing!”

“That’s the spirit.” Justin remarked dully. Sure he should be more supportive, but he didn’t really have the spirit himself to be by Kanji’s side on this. He already had his personal revelation, he already knew what he had to do, what did he want from Justin? For him to confirm what he already knew? It might be nice, but it wasn’t needed; and Justin just wasn’t up for it right about now. Kanji didn’t really catch onto the subtle changes in one’s voice that gave away when they were being sarcastic or when they were down and out though. In that regard, Justin was surprised Yukiko and Kanji didn’t get along better than they did. That’s not to say

they didn’t get along, just that they didn’t really hang out or anything. I guess they were just a lot different in other aspects though; much more significant ones at that.

“Sir! It's all thanks to you!” Kanji beamed with pride at Justin’s half-hearted acceptance for the path Kanji had decided to follow. And with that, his real business for being here was officially over; though whether his business was to tear Justin apart or just to share the good news, Justin was having a hard time deciding on. At this very moment in time Kanji felt like the biggest asshole in all of existence. He didn’t mean it of course; in fact, he didn’t even know he did anything wrong, but that didn’t make it hurt in less. Still, now that business was done with, there was plenty of room for casual conversation. Again, Kanji didn’t quite seem to realize the nervous wreck he had managed to leave Justin in, his leg shaking up and down faster than usual, eyes trembling ever so slightly. “Oh yeah. We're gonna put those dolls of mine up for sale at the shop. They were a big hit with that kid and his mom… They called me just to say "thank you"… Heheh, I got a kick outta that. Oh, I gotta go buy supplies… I need to jet.” In Kanji’s frantic attempt at trying to start up a new conversation, he had managed to get caught up on the topic of his hobbies, and that lead to the realization he had run out of materials for said hobby. He was quick to jump up from his seat and run off, waving Justin goodbye as he darted down the hill without a word more.

And that left Justin up there on the hill, swimming around in his own thoughts, a prisoner to the memories of his agonizing past. You ever watch one of those war movies where the protagonist has those Vietnam flashbacks to the war? It was kind of like that, only instead of war, it was just his father being an abusive asshole. You could argue there was just as much bloodshed though, and Justin would be in a difficult position to defend against that point… other than maybe showing you the introductory scene to Saving Private Ryan, but that wasn’t exactly a historical account or anything: just Hollywood magic doing it’s thing. He sighed as he started out into the little town down below; the little town that became his home nearly a year ago now. It was so frightening the first time he came here, if only because he had left everything he knew behind to live in a country he knew nothing about. Hell he barely knew the language; still didn’t in some respects. He spoke English when he first came here, which was a crapshoot hoping someone would understand him, though it seemed that most everyone here had a good enough understanding of the language to understand what he was saying and respond in kind. Over time, he managed to pick up on some of the language from listening to the others talk to each other based on contextual clues and some translation from Chie, and of course from the few language classes he had managed to stay awake for, but in the end, he wasn’t exactly fluid in Japanese. Maya still didn’t know a lick of Japanese to this day, though he supposed that didn’t really matter.

Funny, this town was so different, and yet so the same at the same time. Hell, he may have just had an encounter with the parallel universe version of himself from all he could tell. Which was very little at the moment; all he felt was this empty

sensation in his chest, a sharp pain shooting through his arteries like a heartburn that just didn’t let up. He stared out into the horizon for a moment, before shakily sticking his hands into his pocket and ripping out a lighter and cigarette, fingers shaking back and forth as they held the tube of tobacco between his bones. He wasn’t sure why he brought these out here today, perhaps because Maya was killing him and his stress levels were through the roof. Perhaps because he was afraid Maya would try to smoke when she barely had the energy to stand. He didn’t know, he just grabbed them. It killed him a bit knowing he was breaking a spiritual promise he made to Chie and his friends, but then… maybe that was the point.

“If I’m lucky maybe this’ll kill me this time…”